

The Women's Candidate

BYRON WILLIAMS

CHAPTER V.

Eleven o'clock on a moonlight night in July is a bewitching time to sit alone on a balcony and dream, and if the dream be staged at Squirrel Inn, where the scent of perennial stock and the rich, salubrious tang of the hemlocks waft up to meet the nostrils, if it be in the midst of towering trees with a lake lullaby chanting and crooning on the breeze and if the spirit of wanderlust is abroad to charm and inspire, ah, then the time and place and the girl are in harmony sublime!

Judge Jackie Vining, clothed in a loose, clinging house gown, sat alone and gave her fancy free rein, enjoying the serenity of the night and the alluring promises of her air castles. And ever and anon as she mused there crept into her thoughts with suffusion of blood to her cheeks, the scene of the dogwood swamp, the face of the man who had held her close against her will and slipped the noose of her lips.

"A perfect gentleman!" Somehow she felt a thrill of gratification at the verdict as rendered by Mae Andrews, for Mae was one of the most charming of the ten girls who idled at Squirrel Inn and her approval of the prisoner promised well for the remaining nine. And, too, it relieved her mind, somewhat, for the responsibility rested heavily on her fair head. As the accepted leader of the vacationists she felt her accountability—besides, if one is kissed by a man one likes to know that after all he is a gentleman, though bold. Confession is good for the soul, and Jackie rejoiced that if she must be her own father confessor, she at least need not blush for the character of the man who made the confession necessary.

Her receding was broken in upon by the redolent odor of tobacco blending pungently with the perfume of the stock. She drew back into the shadows. As she did so, a white-clothed form sped lightly across the lawn toward the house.

Miss Vining's heart thumped strangely. The scudding figure was that of a woman and in the moonlight her hair was fair. The apparition in white lifted up the hotel stairs and disappeared.

The "judge" waited furtively, watching the summer house—from which there soon emerged the figure of a man—and in the night the red coal of his cigar glowed in the darkness! Jackie's indignation sprang into tumultuous being. Who of the ten young ladies was holding a clandestine meeting with his Honor, the Mayor?

Could it be Mae Andrews?

Hastily slipping down the hotel corridor, Judge Vining gently tried the door of Miss Andrews' room. It was locked. With a heavy heart Jackie returned to her apartment; but as she lay tossing in dainty negligence upon her bed, a new worry was harassing her.

Any married woman will bear me out when I say that if there is anything a man dislikes it is to go shopping.



Mabel Arney.

ping. When Mabel Arney, the Tuesday girl, apprised Bedright that she desired his protection on an expedition to Lakeview, he was ungracious enough to deplore the fate that bound him to do as directed—and, besides, there was double reason why he should not go to Lakeview. The game warden and his company of quick-riesters undoubtedly loafed at the village livery stable and would bag him instantly. He suggested Hornby as a trading post, dwelling enticingly upon the advantages offered by the enterprising merchants of that four-cornered community. But Miss Arney sniffed coldly and commanded him to bring forth the two saddle horses owned by Miss Host.

The mayor went away with misgivings—but as the pair cantered off down the wood road, his spirits rose with the sun. Who could be distrustful and gloomy with such a bewitching little lady as Miss Mabel Arney smiling upon him from the saddle opposite?

ing upon him from the saddle opposite?

Miss Arney was petite, with hair of that violet black color, big, laughing eyes and the daintiest red-lipped mouth imaginable. Vivacity and Miss Mabel were pale and mischievous lurked in her horizon like the rosy petals in the sunset's glow.

"I love horses," she babbled, patting the sleek neck of her mottled black mount. "I have an Arabian at home—and he's simply perfect."

"I go in for bulldogs myself," growled the mayor, tactfully. "Nothing beats a bulldog on the front seat of an automobile."

"With the man under it on his back," rippled the girl, curbing her horse as a pig wool-wooled from the highway into the weedy roadside.

The mayor laughed. "And with a woman in the back seat putting at Chawles and telling him every five minutes in a shrill voice that isn't what's the matter with the machine at all!" he scoffed.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Your wife?"

"No, my bulldog."

Striking her horse with the whip, the girl dashed off ahead.

"I'll race you to Lakeview!" she cried over her shoulder.

Bedright's face clouded as he followed. The horse Miss Arney rode was a nervous, long-limbed beast with a wicked eye. She had chosen him of the pair against the mayor's suggestion that she ride the mare he strode.

Around a turn in the road she flew on the black, his ears back, the air in his teeth. Bedright spurred after her, but the mare was no match for her mate. The twisting road kept the girl from view, but ahead he could hear the rapid hoof-beats of the flying animal.

Then, above the noise of the race, there came piercingly a sharp whistle followed by a woman's scream!

The mayor urged the mare forward. At the turn he saw ahead a tractor engine on the turnpike. In the road beside the road two grimy workmen stood over a woman lying upon the leaf mold. The mayor rode up and dismounted. As he approached the girl sat up, bewildered. An ugly scratch on her bridge hand was bleeding freely.

"He—she—slid at the engine," explained, gamely, "and scraped off under this tree."

Bedright's relief was plainly defined in his face.

"You are not seriously hurt?" he inquired, soberly.

"No," she laughed. "In the words of Richard III, 'Give me another horse and bleed up my wounds!'"

He tore a linen handkerchief from his pocket, knelt before her and carefully bound up her hand.

"Thank you," she said, gayly, "and now if you will catch my horse as will proceed."

One of the workmen came forward leading the runaway.

"You were lucky," congratulated the mayor as they set out on the road. "But be careful of that animal. He's a fetter."

A nervous horse and a nervous woman always find themselves in trouble," she said, laughing, "but really he wouldn't have thrown me if I had had a clear field."

"I'm not so sure," admonished the man.

"I'll prove it," cried the girl, excitedly, giving the black full rein and flashing off again, like a madcap.

The mayor, raging, set out as the hail to the kite. They were near the village now. Down the hill the black went like a race horse in a swirl of dust. Across the bridge and through the main street they tore like two leaders on the county-fair course.

And then a baby-car, propelled by a small boy, rolled directly in the path of the mare. Bedright tried to guide free, but the mare was heavy on her feet. There was a crash, a cry from the boy, a yell from the babe—and the devil to pay.

The girl came back trying to hold her flailing horse. Some one grasped the rein of the animal.

"Get off, lady!" ordered the stolid individual, who looked like the village blacksmith. "You're arrested!"

The mayor in the clutches of the village marshal, a burly native, red-faced, thick-necked, stern, looked at the girl blankly. Here was a pretty mess!

And thus they went up the main street to the jail—the mayor and the town policeman in the lead, the stolid individual and Miss Arney second, while behind trailed the baker, the groceryman, the photographer, the town loafer, the village drunkard and thirty-seven small boys!

"Get in here," commanded the marshal, "until I can communicate with Judge Harrison. I reckon the lady won't mind associating with the gent until I kin arrange with the sheriff's wife to take care of her," with a grin on his florid face.

"Not at all!" sniffed the girl, her chin elevated to a degree of high dignity.

When the key had turned in the lock, Bedright thrust his hands deep into his coat pockets and said:

"Damn!"

"If you don't mind," commented the girl, her face serious in spite of her self, "you may repeat that again—for me!"

The mayor refrained—but he liked the girl for her goodness.

"Was the baby hurt?" she asked anxiously.

"Crowded like a young rooster when



"Hurry," urged Miss Arney.

they picked him up," replied Bedright, "but the peace and the dignity of Lakeview is shattered to splinters. We're in for it, I'm afraid."

The girl looked up bravely. "Are you still my prisoner—under parole?"

"Under lock and key," he replied, looking at his watch.

"Then try that window," pointing to a grated aperture through which he went over and peered through the grimy glass.

"This window is on the river bank," he said, "and—yes, there's a boat down there. If we could get these bars loose—"

"Try the leg of this chair," suggested the girl.

"These village lockups are easy to get into—and not—very—hard—working—to get out of," as the rattling casing log got its hold upon the bar.

"Hurry," urged Miss Arney. "They'll be back before we can get out."

"No fear," replied the mayor. "They



Harriet Brooks.

don't go very fast in towns like Lakeview—and besides, the justice of the peace, knowing he is to try a pretty young lady," bowing, "will have to change, shave and put on his array button. We'll make it."

Ten minutes later the body of the mayor slipped through the hiatus in the village jail.

"How—can I get out?" queried an anxious voice from within. "I—can't come first—"

"Let me lift you through. There. Like that," placing the woman's hands upon his shoulders.

As she came out, he took her in his arms, her breath upon his cheek, and set her gently down upon the ground.

"Now, we'll run for it," he cautioned. "There are no cars, but we can drift."

They scampered across the intervening sward. He broke the lock that held the chain of the boat. They climbed in. The current carried them gently down stream in the midday sunlight.

As the girl sat facing him the man could not resist breathing:

"If you will permit the liberty, may I say that you are a very pretty jailbird?"

"Prisoners should never be facetious with their keepers," she replied, making a face at him in the sunlight.

"Here, go! darn ye, where ye goin'! I'm lookin' for you!"

It was the voice of the game warden, bawling excitedly from the bank. For answer, Bedright shaped his hands like a horn and, in mock earnestness, called back:

"I'm on my honeymoon! Every body's doin' it now."

It was dark when a farmer's wagon stopped a block from Squirrel Inn. The mayor and Miss Arney strolled leisurely to the veranda of the hotel.

"He's perfectly lovely!" confided Mabel to Jackie, blushing rosy.

"But!" responded Judge Vining, with a queer little feeling under her corsage. "I'm glad to hear it. The sheriff is waiting for him in the of feet!"

CHAPTER VI

In the office, smoking one of Host's best cigars, his dignity unimpaired, sat the sheriff, waiting.

Mayor Bedright walked up the hotel stairs, oblivious to his pending fate. Suddenly a door opened and a head appeared. A blonde head, a young head, a head to catch the fancy of an artist.

"Shh!" said the owner of the pretty profile.

Bedright stopped, looking around cautiously.

"Hurry!" commanded the girl, holding open the door of her room.

His Honor, the Mayor, hesitated for a moment—and then, throwing conventionalities to the winds, bolted through. The girl turned the key in the lock and faced him accusingly.

"Well of all the blundering bounders! Do you know the sheriff has been hanging around here all afternoon waiting to arrest you?"

The mayor looked brazenly at the girl.

"I expected as much," he said, carelessly.

"What have you been doing now?" she demanded, giving him a severe reprimand from two otherwise kindly hazel eyes.

"Oh, chuck the attitude, Bess," growled the mayor, disgustedly.

"That little imp of a Mabel Arney insisted on riding the black saddle. He ran away with her and in trying to catch the minx, I collided with a baby carriage and spilled the baby's milk. That's all. The confounded natives are always ready to arrest a summer resort, and believing the peace and the dignity of the village had been shattered, they threw us in jail We broke out," suddenly. "Do you blame us!"

Before she could reply there was a knock on the door.

The girl's face went white.

"I'm afraid somebody saw you come in here!" she whispered.

"Nonsense," he breathed. "Here I'll slip under the bed. Go to the door."

In a twinkling the mayor was safely out of sight. The girl opened the door.

"Oh, hello, Jackie," she cried, in a relieved voice. "Come in."

"Bess, we're in a terrible fix," sobbed Miss Vining. "That horrid man took Mabel Arney to Lakeview this morning and got her arrested. The sheriff insists she must be in the hotel and I've promised to bring the entire crowd out on the veranda for inspection. Mabel is frightened at most to death. Bess," dramatically, "we've got to dress her so the sheriff won't know her. Have you a stitch of that faxen hair of yours? I've got Mae Andrews' puffs. They'll match yours. We'll cover Mabel's black thatch until she looks like an albino. Here she is now," as the rustle of skirts proclaimed a new arrival.

The mayor lay on his back, facing the mattress.

"Where's that white princess of yours?" demanded Jackie. "She wore brown today. We'll have to take some tucks in it," going to the closet and helping herself.

"Here, Mabel, get into this, and live!"

"Oh, not here!" protested Bess Vining, snatching the dress from Miss Vining's hands.

The judge looked at Bess blankly. "Why not?"

"Be—because!" shrilled Bess. "I'm afraid. Slip into your room, that's a dear, and I'll bring the switch in at once."

"Oh, who's afraid?" gurgled Mabel, reaching for the gown.

"Step into the closet," implored Miss Vining. "Somebody might come."

"Bess, you're an awful coward," admonished the judge, sternly.

The man under the bed heard the closet door close and waited. There didn't seem to be anything else to do.

Presently Miss Arney reappeared. With hysterical laughter the changing of black-haired Mabel into a ravishing blonde proceeded rapidly.

"There!" exclaimed Miss Vining triumphantly. "The sheriff will never know her in the world. Come on, Mayor Bedright heard the door close. Rolling from under the bed he locked the door and sat down to await developments. Half an hour later somebody knocked at the door. The mayor waited.

"Walter!" whispered an excited voice.



Margaret Farnsworth.

voice. "Open the door! It is I—Bess."

"Come in," replied the mayor, turning the key.

"We fooled him!" she cried, radiantly. "He couldn't find his prisoner. Miss Host told him there were but

ten young ladies—and he went away bewildered—but he's coming back tomorrow to watch for you."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Bess, you scout out and discover what Harriet Brooks—" consulting his list—"would like to have me do tomorrow and whatever it is we start at five in the morning."

The girl hurried away.

The mayor seated himself at a small desk and began to write. He was still at it when Bess returned.

"She has discovered an Indian mound on Glen Island and she wants you to go with her and open it. I have arranged to have her meet you at the bathing beach at sun-up."

The mayor scowled. He was not fond of grave-digging.

"Thank you, Bess," he said finally. "And now if you don't mind, I want to write a while."

"Very well, Walter," she consented, taking up a magazine.

For an hour neither spoke. Then the man laid down his pen and, looking at the sand:

"Bess, I want to know where Jackie Vining keeps that confounded anti-suffrage bill of mine."

"I refuse to enlighten you," sniffed the girl determinedly.

"Bess, you've got to tell me. I must get out of this confounded hole. My campaign opens on the following Saturday and I must be there. I wouldn't mind serving out my sentence but these outraged natives have butted in on the game and they'll have me in jail inside of a week, as sure as Fate. You wouldn't want me to lose my election, Bess?" looking at her with appealing eyes.

"Walter, it is downright mean of you to even think of introducing a bill such as you have prepared. You deserve to lose—but I'm willing," concedingly, "to do what I can for you. The bill—your bill—is in the personal possession of Judge Vining. She—le fact, she wears it inside her shirt-waist to avoid losing it," blushing.

"Now I hope you are satisfied—and you may go. The sheriff has disappeared for the night. You can safely occupy your apartment."

"You're a good sport," said the mayor, putting the girl tenderly on the cheek—and passed out.

(To Be Continued Next Sunday)

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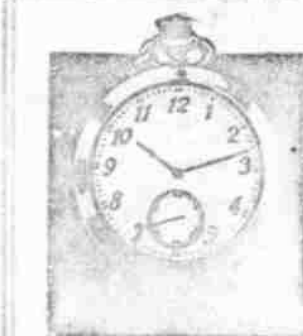
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